



California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



What is the CDF Vegetation Management Program (VMP)?

The VMP was created in 1981 as a cost-sharing program between private landowners and CDF to reduce fire-prone vegetation. Through prescribed burns, as well as mechanical means of modifying vegetation, VMP projects strive to reduce the risk of large damaging wildfires and improve the growing conditions of native plant and wildlife species. A prescribed burn site can also act as a fire break, stopping a wildfire in its tracks; and firefighters use these previously burned areas as safe places to take a stand against a fire.

What is the annual budget for the program?

Approximately \$3.5 million.

How is a prescribed burn planned?

After an interested landowner contacts CDF, the Department does the following:

1. Evaluates the feasibility of the project. (Will it meet our goals, what is the size of the project, what are the potential problems such as homes in the area, what type of vegetation and terrain are in the area, what are the expected weather conditions, costs, etc?)
2. Gathers information from other involved agencies.
3. Designs a prescription (detailed burn plan) for the project.
4. Signs a contract with the landowner.
5. Notifies the community.
6. Implements the burn when conditions meet the prescription.

All prescribed burns are developed in compliance with state and federal rules and regulations including the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and California and Federal Clean Air and Rare and Endangered Species Acts.

How is a prescribed fire burn implemented?

A prescribed fire project is only ignited if all conditions (weather, fuel, equipment, and personnel) designated in the burn plan are acceptable. It cannot be too hot or windy, and humidity levels must be within prescribed limits. In addition, engines and crews must be available to staff the burn.

How the burn is ignited can significantly affect fire behavior and fire effects on the landscape and vegetation. Some projects can be ignited from the ground using fairly simple devices. Very large or complex burns are often ignited from specially equipped helicopters. The decisions to ignite from the ground or from the air, as well as the ignition patterns to use, are detailed in the project's burn plan.

Personnel and equipment are strategically placed and may be assigned to a specific section of the fire, or in some cases may move along the control lines as the fire is ignited and burns away from the lines, decreasing the potential for an escape.



A CDF helicopter ignites a prescribed burn using a heli-torch which drops gelled gasoline. Below, a VMP burn removes dense underbrush.



What is the average cost of a prescribed burn?

An average of \$25 to \$30 per acre, but it can vary based on the number of acres and resources necessary

for the prescribed fire project. This is a cost-sharing program, and the landowner normally pays about 25 to 30 percent of the total project costs.

What agencies does CDF work with when planning a burn?

CDF consults with the California Air Resources Board, local air quality management districts, regional water quality boards, and State and Federal wildlife agencies when appropriate for planning prescribed burns. CDF also has the ability to conduct joint cooperative projects with the U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation by way of a Multi Agency Prescribed Fire Agreement. The Agreement outlines administrative policies, including how lead agency responsibility and fiscal responsibilities are determined on joint agency prescribed fires.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of prescribed burns?

By reducing the risk of destructive wildfires, prescribed fire reduces the threat of life, property and natural resource loss. These burns increase firefighter safety by providing defensible space. Controlled burning can also improve native plant and animal habitat, control the spread of noxious and invasive weeds and restore productivity of grazing lands.

Drawbacks of prescribed burns include smoke and the potential for escapes. While wildfires can burn for weeks creating heavy smoke, planned burning allows CDF to choose the time, location and weather conditions that will minimize smoke impacts. In addition, most prescribed burns are only one or two day projects.

Fire is difficult to control, and escapes may occur on rare occasions even with all of the planning, preparation, and staffing that is part of a prescribed fire project. Escaped burns are usually small in size and few in number, but the potential exists for a few escapes to develop into larger fires. For this reason the State assumes the liability for an escaped fire when conducting prescribed burns with private landowners. Landowners who contract with CDF for prescribed burns are thoroughly briefed on the potential for an escape. This includes an assessment of risk of an escape compared to the risk of leaving hazards untreated on the landscape

The assignment of suppression cost responsibility and accountability for escaped fires that involve cooperating agencies is normally based on a proportion of the number of acres each agency is responsible for during the project.

VMP Statistics

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>#VMP Projects</u>	<u>Acres Burned</u>
1989-90	96	64,029
1990-91	71	42,878
1991-92	*	40,594
1992-93	51	19,587
1993-94	66	27,105
1994-95	46	23,279
1995-96	70	44,176
1996-97	67	50,867
1997-98	44	24,216
1998-99	61	20,381
1999-00	47	19,739
2000-01	65	23,279
2001-02	50	17,643
10 YR Avg.	59	27,027

*Statistics not available.

What is the largest CDF burn to date?

A September 1995 burn within the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit of 7,140 acres.



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